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Statement submitted by Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America is a Christian denomination of two million members in more than 15 countries and a province of the Anglican Communion.

As Christians, we believe that God created all humans equally, in God's image. We believe that God created us capable of living lives worthy of dignity, blessed with adequate resources and to be in loving, liberating and life-giving relationship with God, one another and God's creation. Our scriptures, Jesus' Way of Love and our Baptismal Covenant call us to love one another as Christ has loved us, and to seek and serve Christ in all persons, regardless of gender.

These Christian values are the reason our Church has officially affirmed United Nations international agreements and conventions calling for just and equal treatment of women and girls. The Episcopal Church also supports women and girls through its mission, programs, resolutions of its governing body, General Convention, and advocacy. Episcopal congregations, dioceses, schools, agencies, networks and programs provide and deliver social protection and public services resources to women and girls.

This year's priority theme stresses that women and girls need adequate social protections and public services, coupled by sustainable gender-responsive infrastructure and development, to realize fully their empowerment. Still, many women and girls find that gender-specific gaps, inequalities or discrimination impede their progress.

Thus, we call upon member states, the United Nations and civil society to overcome these impediments:

Implement gender-responsive solutions to gaps in social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure

In social protections, public services and sustainable infrastructure, there are gender gaps in resources, policies and infrastructure that negatively impact women and girls, their families and communities.

Social protections, provided by governments, offset hardship and the risk of poverty in times of vulnerability due to illness, disability, incapacity to work, parental leave, unemployment, retirement and old age. However, women are not always able to access these benefits equally to men. Women are less likely to have pensions or savings due to their elevated levels of informal, part time, or unpaid but essential domestic work and care at home, all of which are productive activities that nevertheless pay less than full-time work and do not give access to pensions. They may need access to child care and family support services, as well.

Public services, by contrast, are resources that governments provide directly or indirectly to all, such as protective security services, education, health care, water, sanitation, electricity. Women and girls may find these resources difficult to access, expensive, insufficient or non-existent, or risky to use. This applies especially in education and health care. Girls may not receive an education as readily as boys in societies where girls must leave school early to marry, work or care for families and the home, reducing their prospects for higher education, employment and economic well-being. Girls may experience harassment while walking to school or in schools. Similarly, health care may be more limited for women and girls, in countries that do not offer universal health care or where social norms may forbid reproductive and sexual health care and family planning services. Health care may also be inadequate due to lack of investment or unequally financed.

Social protections and public services require socially, economically and environmentally sustainable and gender-aware infrastructure. Inadequate, inaccessible or unsustainable infrastructure hampers women's equal physical and digital access to housing, water, sanitation, health care, education and more. Market access, land tenure and property ownership rights must be extended to women. Accessibility must be guaranteed for women and girls with disabilities and transgender persons. Sustainable infrastructure must be responsive to climate change and powered by affordable clean energy.

We urge member states, United Nations entities and civil society to:

- extend or create viable social security systems where these do not exist;
- provide family and social protections, including paid parental leave, affordable and quality child care, pre-school and family support services, and support for single-family households;
- ensure equal access to quality health care, including maternal and infant health, sexual and reproductive health, family planning, and disease prevention;
- adopt awareness campaigns and policies prioritizing education for girls and offer alternative training pathways for women and girls;
- align national laws and policies so that women can purchase and inherit land, property and businesses;
- develop sustainable infrastructure in areas not currently covered, including roads, bridges, transportation, pipelines, culturally appropriate water and sanitation facilities and digital connectivity;
- eradicate harmful environmental practices, reduce carbon emissions, invest in and promote clean energy sources.

Prioritize Marginalized Groups of Women and Girls in Extending Social Protections, Public Services and Sustainable Infrastructure

As followers of Jesus, Episcopalians are called to lift up those who have been marginalized or left behind. This aligns with "Leave No One Behind" and "reach the furthest behind first", principles of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals, which our Church affirmed in 2016.

Reaching the furthest behind first means prioritizing public services, social protections and sustainable infrastructure for particular groups. These include rural women; indigenous women ; women with disabilities ; immigrant women; women from minority groups based on ethnicity, race, caste, descent , language, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity/expression ; migrants, refugees, undocumented workers and stateless women; enslaved, trafficked or incarcerated women; unemployed women; women whose work is considered socially immoral, illegal or unacceptable; older women; and women heads of households. These groups' needs trail broader resource *allocation and programming* and consequently, they are disproportionately disadvantaged, marginalized, discriminated against, displaced and excluded. The intersectionality of race, class, ethnicity and gender exacerbate these challenges. Resources must be more readily accessible, inclusive, adequate and affordable to them.

We urge member states, United Nations entities and civil society to:

- prioritize financing, resource allocation and provision of social protections, public services and sustainable infrastructure for these marginalized groups;

- promote awareness campaigns informing these groups and the public of their rights and opportunities and the political and socio-economic actions to support them;
- provide contextually appropriate education, health care, child care and social support services so they may take advantage of these opportunities.

Promote Gender Equality Education and Practices and Eradicate Gender-Based Violence

In 2015, our Church's General Convention commended "giving priority to the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of all women, including transgender individuals". This requires not only correcting social, political and economic inequalities, but identifying the root causes of gender discrimination, including traditional understandings of gender roles, religious beliefs, sexism, machismo and patriarchy. New values must be taught through culturally contextualized gender equality education for all, including men and boys.

A serious, persistent and pernicious consequence of gender discrimination is gender-based violence, including but not limited to intimate partner violence, physical assault, rape, psychological abuse, harassment, bullying, denigrating language and human trafficking. The #MeToo movement since 2017 demonstrated its depth and breadth. In 2015, our Church's General Convention noted it "deeply regret[ted] the lack of progress in stemming the global pandemic of violence against women" and requested that its clergy and congregations "speak out...to transform the unjust silence of society in the face of this widespread practice of violence".

We urge member states, United Nations entities and civil society to:

- promote gender equality education for all, including men and boys, examining indicators, root causes of inequalities and the positive effects of gender equality;
- expand awareness campaigns and education about gender-based violence and its prevention;
- promote women's participation in decision-making, political leadership and governance locally, regionally, nationally and internationally;
- eradicate early, child and forced marriage;
- universally ratify and implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and its Optional Protocol.

Women and girls deserve full support in accessing social protections, public services and sustainable infrastructure. We encourage member states, United Nations entities and civil society to pursue these priorities and to uphold the values, principles, legislation and programs for gender equality and justice, which benefit all.